

LIGHTHORN PARISH COUNCIL MEETING

10TH NOVEMBER 2020

National Lockdown 2.0: Business Support Grants

Stratford-on-Avon District Council will once again be administering the business support grants offered to local businesses that have to close during the second lockdown that started on Thursday 5 November.

Businesses that meet the criteria, which are required to close will now be able to receive grants worth up to £3,000 a month.

Eligibility

To be eligible for the grant, the business would need to have been open as usual and providing in-person services to customers but has been required to close due to the second national lockdown.

Payments

Payments are triggered by the national decision to close businesses across the District and throughout England. Eligible businesses must have been closed for the entirety of the lockdown period.

More detailed guidance from the Government is needed before payments can be made, but businesses required to close due to the new national restrictions will be eligible for the following:

Businesses occupying a premises with a rateable value less than or equal to £15,000 may claim £1,334 per month or £667 per 2 week period of closure.

Businesses occupying a premises with a rateable value between £15,000 up to a value of £50,999 may claim £2,000 per month or £1,000 per 2 week period of closure.

Businesses occupying a premises with a rateable value of exactly £51,000 or above may claim £3,000 per month or £1,500 per 2 week period of closure.

As with other COVID-19 business grants, local grants to closed businesses will be treated as taxable income.

Eligible businesses will be able to apply online via the Stratford-on-Avon District Council's website, from next week: www.stratford.gov.uk

The Leader takes a look at the economic impact of COVID-19 on the District

During the Covid crisis it is clear that Government has been striving to strike a balance between restricting the spread of the virus and keeping the economy going – and balance is a key word when it comes to local matters.

Mind you, it is a slightly different balance. We have to remain optimistic that we will get through this, that we have a strong and resilient area and there are many good things happening in all areas of our community.

However, there is no shying away from the fact that the pandemic has had a seismic impact on our economy, and our district has been hit harder than most areas.

The number of people in the district who are claiming benefit has tripled since the outbreak, and – while there is a lag in the data – we think we are about to hit a surge in unemployment with the end of furlough.

And when you consider that a couple of months ago if you added together people on self-employed support scheme and those on furlough it equated to 43 per cent of our working population, which is a huge number.

As everyone knows we had an extremely low level of benefit claimant's pre-Covid, and finding people for available posts was the issue. How things can change.

We are believed to be the fourth worst impacted district in the country and that is down to the combination of being a major tourism and hospitality region – Stratford alone attracts around three million visitors a year – and the manufacturing we have on our patch.

We are concentrating on trying to position the economy for the future and ensuring we keep things on track which will benefit the area in medium term, as well as dealing with the day-to-day.

We have had, for example, a £1.5 million grant from the Coventry and Warwickshire LEP for the River Corridor Project. We have put £600,000 of section 106 money into that as well and it is now hitting the design stage. That will enhance the attractiveness of the town for visitors.

We are fortunate in having the Wellesbourne Campus of the University of Warwick which is being developed and has just attracted Lotus to the area, while the Quinton Rail Technology Centre is under new ownership and undertaking some very exciting work.

Like everyone, the council has taken a massive hit on income. We estimate that we will be 25 per cent down on income and it will be one hell of a challenge to balance the books.

It is a question of coping as best we can and I think next year will be a struggle, and I don't see a real recovery until 2022 continuing into 2023.

Across the board I think people have really pulled out all the stops. Businesses have had to be flexible, staff have gone the extra mile, and customers have been understanding.

And I would urge everyone to continue their fantastic support of local businesses – it's been tremendous so far and it will prove invaluable if it continues.

As a council we swung into action very quickly indeed to ensure that grants were issued as quickly as possible to those who qualified – and the teams inside the council have been magnificent in ensuring the money reached people, and, having dealt with the early crisis, we are doing everything we can to put the district on the best footing going forward.

That early work was recognised by a string of messages from businesses who, quite frankly, might not have made it through the lockdown without the support.

Being a part of the Coventry and Warwickshire LEP is brilliant for us and it has more than proved its worth over these last eight months. The ability to talk to other authorities and the private sector and to ensure we have a coherent and joined up approach to recovery will prove to be invaluable.

Its Growth Hub, in particular, has been superb in terms of what it can offer and also the intelligence it has provided.

I think everyone recognises we are in this for the long haul and that there will be more bumps in the road, but I am confident that with the assets we have, the actions we have taken and the collective spirit that our residents and business have shown, that we will emerge in as strong a state as possible.

Green Waste issue

The green waste issue has been put back on the agenda. The charge for green waste was deferred due to the Covid crisis but will come into effect next May. The charge will be £40.00 although if signed up early, this will be reduced to £35.00.

Threat of Terrorism

Assistant Commissioner Neil Basu, UK head of Counter Terrorism Policing announced:

The threat level from terrorism has changed from SUBSTANTIAL to SEVERE as a precautionary measure in response to the events in France and Austria. This threat level moving to SEVERE means it is highly likely that a terrorist attack could happen in the UK, but I want to stress that the change is not based on a specific threat.

"However I do urge the public to remain vigilant and to report any suspicious activity to police. Now, more than ever, we need communities to stand together and reject those who seek to sow division and hatred between us. We need communities and families to bring to our attention anyone they perceive may be vulnerable, a danger or escalating towards terrorism. Anyone with information is urged to contact police by calling 0800 789 321 or by visiting www.gov.uk/ACT. In an emergency or if an incident is in progress always call 999.

"We have activated the established planning mechanisms across the police service, which will lead to enhanced protection and preparedness.

"Some of this will be visible and involve additional police officers being deployed to certain places and locations, which the public can expect to see over the coming days.

"We are also working closely with our local communities – businesses, faith groups and community groups across the UK to provide reassurance and seek their support and assistance in keeping the UK safe.

"As I have previously said, our efforts can only succeed where we have the support of the public – it is communities standing together that defeats terrorism."

Environmental Health

The impact Covid-19 has been immense on the Food and Safety Team and food inspections have been secondary to Covid-19 compliance. 2.3 The merging of Environmental Health and Licensing Teams have enabled additional officers to be integrated into SDC Covid-19 response which has allowed time for food inspections to recommence, but this is at a slower volume than pre Covid-19.

However, it's envisaged that 30 high priority food inspections will be completed by the end of the year. Inspections of these businesses will be conducted once the Covid-19 restriction have been retracted. 2.5 185 food complaints have been received and investigated by the Food and Safety Team and three batches of milk samples have been conducted at dairies within the District. 3 Infectious Disease – Covid-19 3.1. The Covid-19 outbreak plan has been developed with the Warwickshire Health and Wellbeing Board and COVID-19 Health Protection Board. Environmental Health personnel from SDC will play a pivotal role in responding to the local outbreak plan especially in workplaces and working with our partners at Warwickshire County Council (WCC) and Public Health England (PHE) to reduce the spread of coronavirus.